Narrative Therapy

Self-Esteem: Separating Yourself From the Problem

Narrative therapy helps you see a problem as something separate from you, so you can change your relationship with it. Family therapists Michael White and David Epston developed it. They noticed that people often come to believe a problem says who they are. In this worksheet, you give the problem a name, look at what it has done in your life, and find the parts of your story that the problem leaves out.

1 Name the problem

Choose a problem that has been getting in your way, such as worry, anger, self-doubt, or sadness. Give it a name, the way you would name a character in a story. Some people use plain names like "the Worry." Others pick names like "the Critic" or "the Fog."

I will call the problem:

When the problem shows up, it tells me:

Example: The Critic tells me I will mess up, so why even try

Why does this work? *When a problem feels like part of who you are, it is hard to look at it without shame. Talking about it as something outside you, with its own name and habits, gives you room to study how it works and to notice the times you have stood up to it.*

2 Map its effects

Think about how the problem has affected different parts of your life, such as work, school, friendships, family, sleep, or how you see yourself.

Part of my life	What the problem has done here
Work	*The Critic makes me reread every email three times before I send it.*

Are you okay with what the problem has been doing? Why or why not?

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Find the exceptions

The problem's story leaves things out. Think of times when the problem was around but did not get its way, even for a moment. Narrative therapists call these unique outcomes.

A time I stood up to the problem, or it had less power over me:

Example: I sent an email after one read, even though the Critic complained

What did I do, think, or have around me that helped?

What does this say about me, what I care about, or what I am good at?

4 Write a new chapter

Use what you found to start a different story about yourself. In this story, the problem is one character, and you are the author.

Write a few sentences about who you are when the problem is not in charge:

Who in my life has seen this side of me and would not be surprised by this story?

Problems can be stubborn, and a new story takes time to grow. A therapist trained in narrative therapy can help you keep building it.

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